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COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO CERTAIN US COURSES OF ACTION WITH RESPECT TO INDOCHINA

Submitted by the

DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff.

Concurred in by the

INTELLIGENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

on 15 June 1954. Concurring were the Special Assistant, Intelligence, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Department of the Army; the Director of Naval Intelligence; the Director of Intelligence, USAF; the Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff; the Director of Intelligence, AEC. The Assistant to the Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of the jurisdiction of the FBI.

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COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO CERTAIN US COURSES OF ACTION WITH RESPECT TO INDOCHINA

THE PROBLEM

To estimate Chinese Communist and Soviet reactions to the courses of action and consequent situations indicated below.[1]

THE ESTIMATE

PART I

ASSUMPTIONS

A. The treaties of independence between France and the Associated States will have been signed.

B. A regional security grouping including at least the Associated States, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, France, and the United States, and possibly including also New Zealand and the United Kingdom, will have been formed.

C. The Associated States will have publicly requested the direct military participation of members of the regional grouping in the war in Indochina.

D. The French will have undertaken to continue at least the present level of their military commitment in Indochina.

REQUIREMENT 1

To estimate the initial Chinese Communist and Soviet reactions to the participation of US air and naval forces with French Union forces and token Thai and Philippine forces in coordinated ground, naval, and air operations designed to destroy the Communist military forces in Indochina. Air operations would be limited to targets in Indochina. Nuclear weapons would be employed if their use were deemed militarily advantageous but nuclear attacks on the Indochinese civil population as a target system would be avoided.

Chinese Communist Reaction

1. The intervention of US and allied forces in Indochina probably would cause the Chinese Communists to believe that sooner or later they would have to decide whether to

[1] The assumptions and estimative requirements stated herein were furnished to the intelligence community for the purposes of this estimate. We interpret the hypothetical action as occurring within the next twelve to eighteen months.

accept the defeat of the Viet Minh or to intervene in force in order to try to prevent such defeat. Their decision would probably rest mainly, though not exclusively, upon their weighing of the risks and disadvantages arising from the Viet Minh defeat against the likelihood of involvement in major war with the US and the probable consequences of such a war for Communist China. Available evidence gives no unmistakeable indication of what the Chinese Communist decision would be. On balance, however, we believe that the chances are somewhat better than even that the Chinese Communist would decide to take whatever military action they thought required to prevent destruction of the Viet Minh, including when and if necessary, open use of Chinese Communist forces in Indochina.[2] [3]

2. The nature of the assumed US action is such that ample warning would almost certainly be given in advance of actual operations. The Chinese Communists have the capability now to intervene quickly and in such force as to drive French Union forces out of the Delta. The Chinese Communists might choose to exercise this capability before US intervention could be effected.

3. We believe it somewhat more likely, however, that even if the Chinese Communists had determined not to accept the defeat of the Viet Minh they would not intervene openly immediately following the assumed US intervention. They might estimate that US air and naval forces could not, in the absence of US ground forces, decisively alter the course of the war. They might therefore consider their intervention unnecessary at this point and might postpone final decision as to their course of action until they had observed the initial scale and success of the allied military operations and had estimated the probable nature and extent of US aims in the conflict.

4. In this connection, US use of nuclear weapons in Indochina would tend to hasten the ultimate Chinese Communist decision whether or not to intervene. It would probably convince the Chinese Communists of US determination to obtain a decisive military victory in Indochina at whatever risk and by whatever means, and of the consequent danger of nuclear attack on Communist China. Whether this conviction would precipitate or deter Chinese Communist intervention would depend on the military situation in Indochina at the time, the observed military effect of the use of nuclear weapons, and the observed political and psychological effect of such use, particularly its effect on the coherence of the regional security grouping and the Atlantic alliance.

5. In any case, the Chinese Communists would almost certainly greatly increase their logistic support, delivery of arms and equipment, and technical assistance to the Viet Minh. The Chinese Communists would probably increase their deliveries of AA weapons and might send in Chinese AA gun crews. Moreover, the Chinese Communists would probably deploy ground and air units near the Indochina border in order: (a) to warn the US and its allies, and (b) to have forces ready either to intervene on behalf of the Viet Minh or to defend the southern border of China.

6. While maintaining a posture of military readiness, the Chinese Communists would intensify political and propaganda activities designed to exploit anti-Western and anticolonial feelings of the indigenous population of Indochina and the war-fears of neutralist Asian nations and of certain US allies. They would also seek to label the US as an aggressor. In the meantime and throughout the

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[2] The Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff, recommends deletion of the last sentence of this paragraph and would substitute the following:

"However, their decision would be largely determined by the Chinese estimate of the probable extent and effect of US initial action."

[3] The Director of Intelligence, USAF, believes that the last sentence of this paragraph should read as follows:

"Communist China will probably not choose knowingly any course of action likely to expose its fundamental national strengths in war with a major power. However, we believe that Communist China's strength for conducting various kinds of warfare is such, and the motives and judgment of its leaders are such as to make Communist China's courses of action dangerously unpredictable under outside pressure of any appreciable magnitude."

period of military operations, the Communists would almost certainly agitate and propagandize for a "cease-fire" and political settlement, which would preserve the Communist position and prospects.

Soviet Reaction

7. In the assumed situation, the USSR probably would estimate that the US action, though limited to air and naval forces, would considerably increase the risks of unlimited war between the US and Communist China. The USSR would probably prefer that such a war not develop out of the Indochina situation. Nevertheless, the USSR would assure Communist China of continuing military assistance. The USSR would also give complete diplomatic and propaganda support to Communist China and the Viet Minh regime.

REQUIREMENT 2

To estimate Chinese Communist and Soviet reactions to the success of the operations envisaged in the assumptions above (i.e., to the impending effective destruction of the Communist forces in Indochina).[4]

Chinese Communist Reaction

8. As stated in Paragraph 1, we believe that the chances are somewhat better than even that the Chinese Communist, in the assumed situation, would intervene militarily to prevent the destruction of the Viet Minh. If they decided to do so, we believe that the exact timing and nature of their action would depend on various factors, but principally on the scope and character of the US/allied operations they were seeking to counter.[5] [6]

Soviet Reaction

9. In this assumed situation, the USSR would probably continue to support the Chinese Communists. If the Chinese Communists intervened openly in support of the Viet Minh, the USSR would rapidly increase military assistance to Communist China. The Soviet diplomatic and propaganda campaigns against the US would continue full-scale, and the USSR might ask the UN to condemn the US as an aggressor. Thinly veiled threats of Soviet involvement in the fighting and references to the Sino-Soviet Treaty of 1950 would multiply.

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[4] The Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Department of the Army, believes that the results in this requirement could not be achieved by the unbalanced and insufficient forces envisaged.

[5] The Director of Intelligence, USAF, believes that this paragraph should read as follows:

"Communist China will probably not choose knowingly any course of action likely to expose its fundamental national strengths in war with a major power. However, we believe that Communist China's strength for conducting various kinds of warfare is such, and the motives and judgment of its leaders are such as to make Communist China's courses of action dangerously unpredictable under outside pressure of any appreciable magnitude."

[6] The Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff, believes that paragraph 8 should read as follows:

"Communist China would conclude from the assumed impending destruction of Communist forces in Indochina, by limited forces employing nuclear and conventional weapons, that its open military intervention would invite an extension of similar action to Communist China, and would, therefore, probably not intervene militarily."

PART II

ASSUMPTIONS

A. The treaties of independence between France and the Associated States will have been signed.

B. A regional security grouping including at least the Associated States, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, France, and the United States, and possibly including also New Zealand and the United Kingdom, will have been formed.

C. The Associated States will have publicly requested the direct military participation of members of the regional grouping in the war in Indochina.

D. The French will have undertaken to continue at least the present level of their military commitment in Indochina.

E. The Chinese Communists will have openly intervened with military forces in Indochina in order to counter US direct participation as defined in Requirement 1.

REQUIREMENT 3

To estimate Chinese Communist and Soviet reactions to an extension of allied offensive air operations to include military targets in Communist China directly supporting Communist military operations in Indochina or directly threatening the security of Allied forces in the area.[7] *Nuclear weapons would be employed in these operations if it were deemed militarily advantageous to do so, but nuclear attacks on the Chinese civil population as a target system would be avoided.*

Chinese Communist Reaction

10. We consider it probable that before intervening in Indochina the Chinese Communists would have accepted the likelihood of US air attacks against military targets in China. Consequently, they would not feel compelled to withdraw their forces from Indochina solely as a result of the initiation of the air operations assumed above. At the same time, we believe that the Chinese Communists, in order to prevent further destruction to this area of China and particularly to avoid the spread of unlimited US attacks to the whole of China, would intensify efforts to induce the US to enter negotiations for a settlement which would preserve the Communist position and prospects in Indochina.

11. Meanwhile the Chinese Communists, to the full extent of their capabilities, would prosecute the war on the ground in Indochina and attack allied air bases, aircraft carriers, and other installations directly supporting allied operations in the area. They would, however, probably try to keep the war centered in Indochina and, as a consequence, probably would confine their attacks to such directly supporting bases and installations.

12. The use of nuclear weapons under the restrictions given above would greatly increase Chinese Communist concern about US intentions but probably would not by itself cause them to adopt new courses of military action at this time. However, they would threaten nuclear retaliation. They would also exploit to the fullest resultant psychological opportunities and in particular would

[7] In this requirement we interpret targets "directly supporting" Communist military operations to be generally south of the Yangtze River and to consist primarily of transport lines, troop concentrations, and air fields in the area.

charge that the US was using weapons of mass destruction on the civilian population.[8]

13. The Chinese Communists would attempt by all means possible to convince other Asian nations that the US had undertaken to destroy the Chinese Communist regime in order to thwart its efforts on behalf of an indigenous independence movement. If the Chinese had not previously done so, they would probably appeal to the UN to brand US action as a threat to the peace.

Soviet Reaction

14. In this assumed situation, the USSR would greatly increase its military assistance to Communist China, especially supplying modern aircraft and small naval vessels, possibly including submarines, with Soviet personnel to train and advise the Chinese and probably to participate in air defense operations. The USSR would probably not openly commit combat units of the Soviet armed forces and probably would not release nuclear weapons for Chinese Communist use.

15. The Kremlin would also continue its diplomatic and propaganda campaigns against the US, undertaking in the UN to brand the US as an aggressor if this had not previously been attempted. The USSR would support Chinese charges concerning the use of nuclear weapons against civilian populations. At the same time, the USSR would probably advise the Chinese Communists to negotiate for a cessation of hostilities on the basis of the status quo at the time and would try to establish a position as peacemaker.

REQUIREMENT 4

To estimate Chinese Communist and Soviet reactions to the following additional allied courses of action, undertaken subsequently to those above:

a. Extension of allied offensive air operations to additional selected military targets in Communist China, including the use of atomic weapons under the same conditions as above.

b. Naval blockade of the China coast.

c. Seizure or neutralization of Hainan.

d. Chinese Nationalist operations against the Chinese mainland.

Chinese Communist Reaction

16. As a consequence of this allied broadening of the war, the Chinese Communists would probably conclude that the US was prepared to wage unlimited war against them. They would continue to defend themselves to the limit of their capabilities and would probably make vigorous efforts to secure the full participation of the USSR. At the same time, they would intensify their efforts to end the war by negotiations, and might eventually indicate in some way their willingness to withdraw from Indochina in order to obtain a cease-fire.[9] If unable to obtain a cease-fire agreement, the Chinese Communists would accept the fact of unlimited war with the US and would wage such war to the full extent of their remaining capabilities.

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[8] The Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff, believes this paragraph should read:

"Nuclear weapon attacks on Communist China would undoubtedly result in a much greater Chinese Communist reaction than nuclear attacks on the Indochinese battleground. In addition, such attacks would probably indicate to the Chinese Communists a US willingness to exploit its superiority in nuclear weapons and delivery capability to force them out of Indochina. Since the nuclear attack contemplated in this requirement is of a limited nature, the Chinese Communist rulers would retain control of the government and country and, with the initial attacks, they would probably make urgent appeals to the USSR for nuclear weapons and additional military assistance. They might also increase the tempo of their military operations and would undoubtedly endeavor to induce the United States to enter negotiations in the hope of forestalling further attacks. A Chinese Communist decision to withdraw or not would be dependent primarily upon continued or increased US nuclear attacks and other US action as well as upon Soviet reaction. It is believed, however, that the Chinese Communists would be willing to withdraw from Indochina rather than be subjected to further destruction of their homeland."

[9] The Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff, and the Director of Intelligence, USAF, suggest that the words "might eventually" in this sentence should be replaced with "would probably."

Soviet Reaction

17. In this assumed situation, the USSR would continue to provide military assistance to Communist China as indicated above, but would probably refuse Chinese Communist demand for full Soviet participation in the war. The Kremlin would strongly urge the Chinese Communists to negotiate for a cessation of hostilities on the basis of withdrawing from Indochina.[10] If the Chinese Communists could not obtain a cease-fire agreement, the USSR would provide Communist China with military assistance in every way short of openly committing combat units of the Soviet armed forces in operations against US and allied forces outside Communist-held territory. The USSR would provide military resources and equipment for Chinese Communist attacks on US bases or US forces anywhere in the Far East. At this stage of the conflict, the USSR might provide Communist China with nuclear weapons and the technical personnel required for their use.[11] [12]

18. The USSR would continue its diplomatic and propaganda campaigns against the US, insisting that the Soviet aim was purely the defense of China against outright aggression. The USSR would also begin at least partial mobilization of its own military forces on a war basis. It would issue thinly veiled threats of general war, suggesting attacks on Western Europe and on the continental US, but would probably confine its operations to the defense of China so long as the US did not attack Soviet territory.

REQUIREMENT 5

To estimate Chinese Communist and Soviet reactions to the success of the foregoing operations (i.e., to the impending effective destruction of the Chinese Communist capability to conduct military operations outside the borders of Communist China).[13]

Chinese Communist Reaction

19. Unless the USSR was willing to make an unlimited commitment of Soviet forces to prevent the success of the assumed US and allied operations, we believe that the Communist Chinese, under the assumed circumstances, would accept any US terms for a settlement which preserved the integrity of China under the Chinese Communist regime.

Soviet Reaction

20. In this assumed situation, we believe the USSR would urge the Chinese Communists to accept any US terms for a settlement which preserved the integrity of China under the Chinese Communist regime.[14] So long as the fighting continued, however, the USSR would continue its aid to China.

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[10] The Assistant Chief of Staff, G–2, Department of the Army, recommends the deletion of "on the basis of withdrawing from Indochina," believing that at this state of the conflict the Kremlin would not willingly acquiesce in the surrender of any Communist-held territory in Indochina or elsewhere.

[11] The Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff, and Director of Intelligence, USAF, believe that this sentence should read:

"We do not believe that the USSR would release nuclear weapons for Chinese Communist use."

[12] The Assistant Chief of Staff, G–2, Department of the Army, substitute for the last sentence:

"It is also believed that the USSR would give serious consideration to making a substantially greater military contribution including nuclear weapons and the technical personnel required for their use."

[13] The Assistant Chief of Staff, G–2, Department of the Army, believes that the results assumed in this requirement could not be achieved by the unbalanced and insufficient force envisaged.

[14] The Assistant Chief of Staff, G–2, Department of the Army, would add "and retained a Communist foothold in Indochina."